KATHLEEN

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Thomas B. Collins
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(With BART HALEY)

"O, I'm so glad you're going to read your notes to Mr. Blair," she said mischievously. "They are fascinating and there's such a jolly lot of them."

KATHLEEN

BY

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

FRONTISPIECE

BY

WALLACE MORGAN

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TO

THE REAL KATHLEEN

With Apologies

KATHLEEN

KATHLEEN

I

THE Scorpions were to meet at eight o'clock and before that hour Kenneth Forbes had to finish the first chapter of a serial story. The literary society, named in accordance with the grotesque whim of Oxford undergraduates, consisted of eight members, and it was proposed that each one should contribute a chapter. Forbes was of a fertile wit, and he had been nominated the first operator. He had been allowed the whole Christmas vacation to prepare his opening chapter;

which was why on this first Sunday of term while the rest of Merton College was at dinner in hall, he sat at his desk desperately driving his pen across the paper.

Forbes's room in Fellows' Quad was one of those that had housed Queen Henrietta Maria in 1643, and though Forbes's own tastes were nondescript the chamber still had something of an air. The dark wood panelling might well have done honour to a royal lodger, and a motion-picture producer would have coveted it as a background for Mary Pickford. It was unspoiled by pictures: two or three political maps of Europe, sketchily drawn with coloured crayons, were pinned up here and there. The room was a typical Oxford apartment: dark, a little faded, but redeemed

by the grate of glowing coals. Behind the chimney two recessed seats looked out over the college gardens; long red curtains were drawn to shut out the winter draughts. It was the true English January—driving squalls of rain, dampness, and devastating chill. The east wind brought the booming toll from Magdalen tower very distinctly to the ear, closely followed by the tinny chime in Fellows' Quad. It was half past seven.

Forbes laid down his pen, looked quizzically at the last illegible lines slanting up the paper, and realized that he was hungry. His untasted tea and anchovy toast still stood in the fender where the scout had put them three hours before.

He switched on the electric light over

the dining table in the centre of the room, and, dropping on the sofa before the fire, prodded the huge lumps of soft coal into a blaze. The triangular slices of anchovy toast were cold but still very good, and he devoured them with appetite. He lit a cigarette with a sigh of content, and reflected that he had not crossed his name off hall. Therefore he must pay eighteen pence for dinner, even though he had not eaten it. Also there lay somewhat heavily on his mind the fact that at ten the next morning he must read to his tutor an essay on "Danton and Robespierre," an essay as yet unwritten. That would mean a very early rising and an uncomfortable chilly session in the college library, a dismal place in the forenoon. Never mind, first came a jolly evening

with the Scorpions. The meetings were always fun, and this one, coming after the separation of a six-weeks' vacation, promised special sport. Carter was down for a paper on Rabelais; King would have some of his amusing ballades and rondeaus; and above all there would be the first chapter of the serial, from which the members promised themselves much diversion. It was too late now to attempt anything on Danton and Robespierre; he picked up a volume of Belloc and sat cosily by the fire.

A thumping tread sounded on the winding stairs, then the faint clink of a large metal tray laid on the serving table outside, and a muffled knock at the "oak," the thick outer door which Forbes had "sported" when he came in

at six to write his stint. He unfastened the barrier and admitted Hinton, the scout, who bore in a tray of eatables, ordered by Forbes from the college store-room for the refreshment of his coming guests. Forbes, like most men of modest means, made it a point of honour to entertain lavishly when it was his turn as host, and the display set out by Hinton made an attractive still life under the droplight. A big bowl of apples and oranges stood in the centre; tin boxes from Huntley and Palmer, a couple of large iced cakes, raisins, nuts, and a dish of candied fruits ended the solids. There was also a tray of coffee cups and a huge silver coffee pot bearing the college arms, flanked by a porcelain jug of hot milk. De Reszke cigarettes, whiskey and soda, and a new

tin of John Cotton smoking mixture completed the spread—which would be faithfully reflected in Forbes's "battels," or weekly bills, later on. Young men at Oxford do themselves well, and this was a typical lay-out for an undergraduate evening.

Hinton, a ruddy old man with iron-gray hair and a very red and bulby nose, was a garrulous servant, and after a tentative cough made an attempt at small talk.

"I didn't see you in 'all to-night, sir."

"No," said Forbes, "I had some writing to do, Hinton."

"Oh yes, sir," said Hinton, according to the invariable formula of college servants. A moment later, after another embarrassed cough, he began again.

"Very wet night, sir; they say the

towpath will be under water in another day or so."

Forbes was not a rowing man, and the probable submerging of the towpath was not news that affected him one way or the other. His only reply was to ask the scout to refill the coal-scuttle. For this task Hinton donned an old pair of gloves and carried in several large lumps of coal in his hands from the bin outside. Then he disappeared into the adjoining bedroom to pour out a few gallons of very cold water into Forbes's hip bath, to turn down the sheets, lay out his pajamas, and remove a muddy pair of boots to be cleaned. Such are the customs that make sweet the lives of succeeding undergraduates at Oxford. It is pleasant to know that Palmerston, Pitt,

Gladstone, Asquith—they have all gone through the old routine. Forbes's father had occupied the very same rooms, thirty years before, and very likely old Hinton, then a "scout's boy," had blacked his boots. Certainly Forbes senior had lain in the same bedroom and watched Magdalen Tower through the trees while delaying to get up on chilly mornings.

"Anything else to-night, sir?" said Hinton, as Forbes put down Belloc and began to clean a very crusty briar.

"Nothing to-night."

"Thank you, sir," said Hinton and took his departure, after poking up the fire and removing the dead tea things.

The eight o'clock chimes spoke as Hinton clumped downstairs, and a few moments later Forbes's guests began to

straggle in. All were wet and ruddy from rain and wind, and, as they discarded raincoats and caps, disclosed a pleasant medley of types. The Scorpions was a rather recent and informal society, but it had gathered from various colleges a little band of temperamental congenials who found a unique pleasure in their Sunday evening meetings. None of them was of the acknowledged literary successes of the university: their names were not those seen every week in the undergraduate journals. And yet this obscure group, which had drawn together in a spirit of satire, had in it two or three men of real gift. Forbes himself was a man of uncommon vivacity. Small, stocky, with an unruly thatch of yellow hair and a quaintly wry and homely face, he

hid his shyness and his brilliancy behind a brusque manner. Ostensibly cynical and a witty satirist of his more sentimental fellows, his desk was full of charming ballades and *pièces d'amour*, scratched off at white heat in odd moments. His infinite fund of full-flavoured jest had won him the nickname of Priapus. But beneath the uncouth exterior of the man, behind his careless dress and humorously assumed coarseness, lay the soul of a poet—sensitive as a girl, and devout before the whisperings of Beauty.

Stephen Carter and Randall King were first to arrive, and seized the ends of the fireside couch while Forbes poured their coffee.

"A Clark Russell of an evening!" said Carter, stretching his golfing

brogues to the blaze. "Don't you love a good drenching, downpouring night? I do!" He was a burly full-blooded blond, extravagantly facetious in convivial moments, and a mournful brooder in solitude. King, better known as "The Goblin," was a dark, whimsical elf in thick spectacles, much loved in the 'varsity dramatic society for his brilliant impersonations. The Goblin said nothing as he sipped his coffee and gazed at the fire.

"There you go again, Falstaff!" exclaimed Forbes to Carter, as he unlocked a corner cupboard and drew out a bottle of port. "The universal enthusiast! I believe you'll be enthusiastic about the examiners that plough you!"

"What, Falstaff get ploughed?" said

a vast and rather handsome newcomer, flinging open the door without knocking. "I think he's down for a ruddy First!" This was Douglas Whitney, of Balliol.

Carter's only answer to both these remarks was to drain a glass of the port which Forbes was decanting.

"I say, Priapus, what vile port!" he said. "Is this some of the vintage you crocked poor old Hinton with?"

"Any port in a storm, Falstaff," said the Goblin, mildly.

As Forbes was pouring out the coffee loud shouts of "Minters!" greeted the next arrival. This was Johnny Blair of Tennessee and Trinity, the only American among the Scorpions. Blair was a Rhodes Scholar whose dulcet Southern drawl and quaint modes of speech were a

constant delight to his English comrades. His great popularity in his own college was begun by his introduction of mint julep, which had given him his nickname.

"Hello, Minters!" cried Forbes. "What cheer?"

"Large tabling and belly cheer," said Blair, quoting his favourite Elizabethan author.

By the time Forbes had poured out eight cups of coffee and as many glasses of wine, Keith, Graham, and Twiston had come in, making the full gathering. There was much laughing and banter as the men stood round the table or by the fire, lighting pipes and cigarettes, and helping themselves to fruit and cake. Finally, when everyone was settled in a semicircle round the fire, Forbes

hammered his coffee cup with a spoon. According to the custom of the society the host of the evening always acted as chairman.

"The meeting will please come to order," said Forbes. "Brother Scorpions, what is your pleasure? Has the secretary anything to report?"

The gatherings of the Scorpions were pleasingly devoid of formality, and untrammeled by parliamentary conventions. There were no minutes, and the only officer was a secretary who sent out postal cards each week, reminding the members of the time and place of the next meeting.

King, puffing happily at a large pipe, declared that no official business required attention.

"Then I call upon Falstaff for his

delightful paper on Rabelais," said Forbes.

A small electric reading lamp was propped behind Carter's head, and the Scorpions disposed themselves to listen. Carter pulled an untidy manuscript from his pocket, and after an embarrassed cough, began to read.

The general tenor of an undergraduate essay on Rabelais, intended for the intimacy of a fireside circle, may readily be guessed. The general thesis of the composition was of course to prove that Rabelais was by no means the low-minded old dog of Puritan conception; or, as Carter put it, that he was "not simply a George Moore"; but that his amazing writings bore witness throughout to a high and devoted ethical purpose. It is even conjectur-

able that Carter may have said *puribus omnia pura;* but if he did so, it was with so droll an accent that his audience laughed amain. At all events his reading was punctuated with cheery applause, and at the conclusion the Scorpions renewed their acquaintance with those historic affinities whiskey and soda. Discussion was brisk.

The meditative Goblin then was called upon for his poems; and, after becoming hesitation, unfolded a sheaf of verses. His rhymes were always full of quaint and elvish humour which was very endearing. His ballade with the refrain "*When Harry Baillie kept the Tabard Inn,*" was voted the best of the six he read.

But the event of the evening was to be the serial story, which Forbes had

been appointed to begin. A new round of refreshments was distributed, and then the host took his place under the reading lamp.

"This needs a word of explanation," he said. "Having the whole vacation to work on this, naturally I did nothing until tea time this afternoon. I didn't even have an idea in my head until yesterday. About four o'clock yesterday afternoon I was strolling down the Broad in desperation. You know when there is some hateful task that has to be done, one will snatch at any pretext for postponing it. I stopped in at Blackwell's to look for a book I wanted. Up in one corner of the shop, lying on a row of books, I found this."

Impressively he drew from his pocket a double sheet of notepaper and held it up.

"It was a letter, evidently written by some girl to a man at the 'varsity. Finding it there, forgotten and defenseless, I could not resist reading it. It was a very charming letter, not too intimate, but full of a delicious virgin coyness and reserve. Then a great idea struck me. Why not take the people mentioned in the letter and use them as the characters of our story? We know that they are real people; we know their first names; that's all we know about them. The rest can be left to the invention of the Scorpions."

Generous laughter greeted the idea.

"Let's hear the letter!" cried someone.

"Yes," said Forbes, "before reading my chapter I'll read you the letter. And then remember that our story is

to be built up solely upon this document. There are to be no characters in the story except those mentioned in the letter, and our task must be to delineate them in such a way that they are in keeping with the suggestions the letter gives us. Here it is."

X X X X

These are from Fred.

318, Bancroft Road,
Wolverhampton.
October 30, 1912.

Dear Joe:

Thank you so much for the tie—it is pretty and I do wear ties sometimes, so I sha'n't let the boys have it.

You must think me rather ungrateful not writing before, but I have been out the last two evenings and have had no time for letters. Yesterday Mother and I went to Birmingham as I had my half-term holiday.

I hope you managed to get some tea

after writing to me, otherwise I shall feel so grieved to think I was the cause of your starvation. By the way, I read your latest poem and I don't like it—not that that will trouble you much I'm sure. The idea isn't at all bad, but that's all I like about it.

I haven't a bit of news, and I have just found out it is too late to catch the post to-night, so you will have to wait a little longer for this precious letter—it will be precious, won't it?

Charlie has just come home from his class, so I must bring his food for him. Daddy's lumbago is better, I'm glad to say.

Good-night, and with many thanks

I remain

Yours,

KATHLEEN.

Excuse this scrawl, but the pen's groggy.

A moment of silence followed the reading of the letter.

"Joe's a lucky boy," said Whitney. "She's a darling."

"The letter doesn't tell us much," said Forbes, as he handed it round for examination; "but more than you might think. Before writing my chapter I summarized the data. Here they are:

"1. *Joe.* He's a member of the 'varsity who writes poetry. Either it's published in some magazine or he sends it privately to her. The blighter has sent Kathleen a tie of some kind—probably a scarf with his college or club colours. He's got as far as the plaintive stage: he tells her that he is going without his tea just to write to her. (Probably half a dozen crumpets and four cups of tea were simmering inside of him as he wrote). So much for Joe. I'll wager he's a Rhodes Scholar!

"2. *Kathleen.* I put her at seventeen, and (as Whitney says) she's a

darling. She's at school still. She's adorably sane. She doesn't care for Joe's yowling poetry (probably he writes Verlaine kind of stuff, or free verse, or some blither of that sort). She has younger brothers ('the boys') and she helps her mother run the house. I think she likes Joe better than she cares to admit—see the touch of coquettishness where she says 'It *will* be precious, won't it?' And how adorably she teases him in those four crosses marked 'These are from Fred.' Gad, I'm jealous of Joe already!

"3. *Fred.* I think he's the older brother; probably recently left the 'varsity; a friend of Joe's, perhaps.

"4. *Charlie* is one of the younger brothers. He goes to some kind of night school or gymnasium. Probably

an ugly little beggar. Why doesn't he get his food for himself?

"5. *The Mother.* Don't know anything about her except that she went to Birmingham with Kathleen.

"6. *The Father.* Has lumbago."

"One thing you don't mention," said Graham. "It's an easy run from here to Wolverhampton on a motor bike!"

"Rather a sell if Joe should turn out a boxing blue, and mash us all into pulp for bagging his letter!" said Whitney. There was a general laugh at this. Whitney was over six feet, rowed number 5 in the Balliol boat, and was nicknamed the Iron Duke for his muscular strength.

"Go on with your chapter, Priapus," said the Goblin.

II

WHEN Forbes had finished there was general laughter and applause. The whimsical idea of building a tale around the persons of the letter was one which his playful mind was competent to develop, and he had written a deft and amusing introduction. Taking "Joe" as his subject he had sketched that gentleman's character with a touch of irony. He had made him a Rhodes Scholar from Indiana (evoking good-natured protest from Minters) and had carried him on a vacation to Guilford House, a small hotel in London much frequented by

Rhodes Scholars. There he had made him meet Kathleen who, with her mother, was staying in London for a few days. Forbes had a taste for brunettes, and in his description of the imagined Kathleen he had indulged himself heartily. He found her to be seventeen, slender, with that strong slimness that only an English girl achieves; with a straight brown gaze and abundant dark chestnut hair. She was captain of her school hockey team, it seemed; she was good at tennis and swimming and geometry; she had small patience with poetry and sentiment. But within the athletic and straightforward flapper Forbes thought he saw the fluttering of deeper womanhood; the maiden soul erecting a barrier of abrupt common sense about itself to conceal the shy and

sensitive feelings that were beginning to blossom. Such at any rate was Kenneth Forbes's psycho-analysis, and he developed his chapter toward a climax where Kathleen and Joe were left walking in Regent's Park, and the next author would find some difficulty in knowing how to proceed with the second instalment.

"Well done indeed!" cried Blair, as Forbes laid down his manuscript and reached for his pipe. There was a general murmur of assent as the men got up to stretch and talk. Someone punched the coals into flame, and the bowl of fruit was passed round.

"Who's to write the next chapter?" asked Graham.

"Let Falstaff do it!" cried Blair. "He's the sentimentalist! But go easy

on poor Joe. You know all Rhodes Scholars don't come from Indiana! Have a heart!"

"Do whatever you like to Joe!" cried Forbes; "But be careful with Kathleen! She's adorable! I'm going to write a ballade to her and mail it to her anonymously."

"I wish there was some way of getting hold of her picture," said Keith.

"Her picture?" said Graham. "Nonsense! Why not see the flapper herself? I'm going to bike over there on my Rudge, erb round till I find the street, and then skid like hell right on to her doorstep. I shall lie there in mute agony until I'm carried indoors."

"I say, now, that's no fair!" cried

Forbes. "I discovered her! Just because you've got a motor bike you mustn't take an advantage!"

"Look here," said the Goblin, mildly, speaking from a blue cloud of Murray's Mixture, "we must all sign a protocol, or a mandamus or a lagniappe or whatever you law men call it, not to steal a march. I think we'd all like to meet the real Kathleen. But we must give a bond to start fair and square, and nobody do anything that isn't authorized by the whole club."

"Right-O!" cried several voices.

"All right, then," said the Goblin, "fill glasses everyone, and we'll solemnize the oath. Brother Scorpions, I do you to wit that we all, jointly and severally, promise not to take any steps toward making the acquaintance of said

Kathleen until so authorized by the whole society. So help me God!"

They all drank to this, with some chuckles.

"What a lark if we could get Kathleen down for Eights Week!" said someone.

"Very likely Joe will have her here," said Whitney. "You seem to forget that he's been rowing this course for some time."

They all scowled.

"I wonder how many members of the 'varsity are called Joe?" Keith asked.

"About three hundred, I dare say," said Falstaff.

"I tell you what we might do," said Forbes. "When the yarn's finished we can send it to her, explain just how the whole thing happened, and ask permis-

sion to call. She's got a sense of humour, I'll swear!"

"Balmy!" retorted Falstaff. "She'd probably be frightfully fed because you bagged her letter! 'S a hell of a thing to do, crib a lady's letter!"

"It's a hell of a thing to do to leave it lying around!" cried Forbes, impenitent. "No quarter for Joebags! Let the punishment fit the crime."

"Well, you chaps, I've got to sheer off," said Whitney. "It's nearly eleven and I've got an essay on the stocks. Cheer-o Priapus, I've had a ripping time."

" 'Arf a mo,' " cried Forbes. "Who's to do the next chapter, and where do we meet next week?"

"Falstaff!" cried several voices.

"Why not do two chapters a week,"

said Carter. "I'll do one, and Goblin can do another. Let's meet in my rooms."

This was agreed to, and after much scuffling with greatcoats and scarves the guests tramped off down the stairs and out into the rainy quad. Forbes could hear them, a minute later, thundering with their heels on the huge iron-studded college gate as they waited for the porter to let them out. The room was foul with smoke, and he opened a window over the gardens letting in a gush of chill sweet air and rain. Through the darkness he could hear many chimes, counting eleven. He looked wearily at the scribbled notes for his essay on Danton and Robespierre: then shrugged his shoulders and went to bed.

III

BY THE time that Carter and King had written their chapters and read them aloud, the Scorpions were all frankly adorers of Kathleen; by mid-term she had become an obsession. Eric Twiston and Bob Graham, "doing a Cornstalk" (as walking on Corn-market Street is elegantly termed) were wont to dub any really delightful girl they saw as "a Kathleen sort of person." At the annual dinner of the club, which took place in a private dining room at the "Clarry" (the Clarendon Hotel) in February, Forbes was called upon to respond to the toast

"The Real Kathleen." His voice, tremulous with emotion and absinthe frappé, nearly failed him; but he managed to stammer a few phrases which, thought at the time to be extemporaneous, called forth loud applause; but it was found later that he had jotted them down on the tablecloth during the soup and fish courses. "Fellow Scorpers," he said, "I mean you chaps, look here, I'm not much at this dispatch-box business, but—hem—I want to say that I regard Kathleen with feelings of iridescent emotion. I feel sure that she is a pronounced brunette and that the Blue Flapper we all used to see at the East Ocker is nowhere. I've been playing lackers (lacrosse) this term and I give you my word that when I've been bloody well

done in and had an absolute needle of funk I had only to think of Kathleen to buck me up. Hem. Now gentlemen, you may think I'm drunk (loud cries of *No!*) but I want to say in truth and soberness that any man who thinks he's got Kathleen for bondwoman—hem—has me to reckon with!"

The applause at this speech was so immoderate that a party of Boston ladies dining with a Chautauqua lecturer in the Clarendon's main dining room, shuddered and began looking up time-tables to Stratford.

By this time the serial story had grown to the length of seven or eight chapters, and the Scorpions became so engrossed in the fortunes of the Kenyons (so, for convenience, they had dubbed Kathleen's family) that at the

dinner a separate health was drunk to each character in the story, and one of the members was called upon to reply. Falstaff Carter responded to the toast to "Joe," and recounted his secret investigations into the number of members of the university who bore that name. He claimed to have tabulated from the university almanac 256 men so christened, and offered to go into the life history of any or all of them. He said that he was happy to say that the only Joseph who seemed at all likely to be a poet was a scrubby little man at Teddy Hall, who wore spectacles and a ragged exhibitioner's gown and did not seem to threaten a serious rivalry to any Scorpion bent on supplanting him. "I also find," he added, "that the master of the New College and Mag-

dalen beagles is called Joe. He is a member of the Bullingdon, and if he is the cheese it's distinctly mooters whether any of the Scorpers have a ghostly show; but I vote, gentlemen, that we don't crock at this stage of the game."

It was decided at the dinner that during the ensuing Easter vacation the Scorpions should make a trip to Wolverhampton, en masse, for the purpose of picketing Bancroft Road and finding out what Kathleen was really like. And then, after singing "langers and godders" (Auld Lang Syne and God Save the King) the meeting broke up and the members dispersed darkly in various directions to avoid the proctors.

IV

FRIDAY the fifteenth of March was the last day of term. The Scorpions, busy in their various ways with the hundred details that have to be attended to before "going down," were all pleasantly excited by the anticipation of their quest, which was to begin on the morrow. Carter, shaking hands with the warden of New College in the college hall (a pleasant little formality performed at the end of each term) absent-mindedly replied "Wolverhampton" when the warden asked him where he was going to spend the vacation. He was then hard put to it to

avoid a letter of introduction to the vicar of St. Philip's in that city, an old pupil of the warden. King, bicycling rapidly down the greasy Turl with an armful of books, collided vigorously with another cyclist at the corner of the High. They both sprawled on the curb, bikes interlocked. "My god, sir!" cried the Goblin; "Why not watch where you're going?" Then he saw it was Johnny Blair. "Sorry, Goblin," said the latter; "I—I was thinking about Kathleen." "So was I," said King, picking up his books. And in defiance of the University statute of 1636 (still unrepealed) which warns students against "frequenting dicing houses, taverns, or booths where the nicotian herb is sold," they went into Hedderly's together to buy tobacco.

After breakfast the next morning they were all in cabs on their way to the Great Western Station. It was a mild and sunny day, with puffs of spring in the air. Who can ever forget the Saturday morning at the end of term when the men "go down"? Long lines of hansoms spinning briskly toward the station, with bulging portmanteaus on the roof; the wide sunny sweep of the Broad with the 'bus trundling past Trinity gates; a knot of tall youths in the 'varsity uniform of gray "bags" and brown tweed norfolk, smoking and talking at the Balliol lodge—and over it all the clang of a hundred chimes, the gray fingers of a thousand spires and pinnacles, the moist blue sky of England. . . . Ah, it is the palace of youth, or it was once.

The Scorpions met on the dingy north-bound platform. Graham, Keith, and Twiston had been obliged to scratch owing to other more imperative plans; but five members boarded the 10 o'clock train in high spirits. Forbes, Carter, King, Blair, and Whitney—they filled a third-class smoker with tobacco and jest.

"Now, Goblin," cried Falstaff, as the train ran past the Port Meadow, and the Radcliffe dome dropped from view; "Open those sealed orders! You promised to draw up the rules of the game."

King pulled a paper from his pocket.

"I jotted down some points," he said. "This is the time to discuss them.

" *Rules to be Observed by the Scorpions on the Great Kathleen Excursion*

"1. The headquarters of the expedition will be the Blue Boar Inn at Wolverhamp-

ton. (I've written to them to engage rooms.)

"2. The Kriegspiel will begin to-day at 2 P. M., and manœuvres will continue without intermission until someone is declared the winner, or until time is called.

"3. The object of the contest is to make the acquaintance of Kathleen; to engage her in friendly conversation; to win her confidence, and to induce her to accept an invitation to Commem, or Eights Week.

"4. Any deception, strategy, or tactics which are not calculated to give intolerable distress or embarrassment to Kathleen and her family, are allowable.

"5. If by noon on Tuesday no one shall have succeeded in making friends with Kathleen, the game shall be declared off."

"Suppose she's not at home?" said Whitney.

"We'll have to chance that."

"What time do we get there?"

"I've ordered lunch at the Blue

Boar at one o'clock. This train gets to Wolvers at 12:30."

It was a merry ride. The story of Kathleen as they had written it was discussed pro and con.; the usual protests were launched at Carter for having in his chapter lowered the theme to the level of burlesque; praise was accorded to the Goblin for the dexterity with which he had rescued the plot. Blair's chapter had been full of American slang which had to be explained to the others. "Joe," the Rhodes Scholar hero, had shown a vein of fine gold under Blair's hands: he bade fair to win the charming Kathleen, although the story had not been finished owing to the examinations which had fallen upon the brotherhood toward the end of term. The game, begun in pure jest, had taken

on something of romantic earnest: there was not one of these young men who did not see in Kathleen his own ideal of slender, bright-cheeked girlhood. And when the train pulled into Wolverhampton, they tumbled out of their smoking carriage with keen expectation.

V

PERHAPS the best way to pursue the next episodes in the quest is in the words of Johnny Blair, the Rhodes Scholar, who jotted down some notes in a journal he kept:

We got to Wolverhampton 12:25, Ingersoll time. Had a jolly trip on the train, all the Scorps laying bets as to who would be first to meet Kathleen. I lay low, but did some planning. Didn't want to let these English blighters get ahead of me, especially after all the ragging Indiana Joe got in the story.

Train stopped at Birmingham at

noon. My tobacco pouch had run empty, and I hopped out to buy some Murray's at the newsstand. Saw the prettiest flapper of my life on the platform—the real English type; tweed suit, dark hair, gray eyes, and cheeks like almond blossoms. She had on a blue tam-o' shanter. Loveliest figure I ever saw, perfect ankle, but the usual heavy brogues on her feet. Why do English girls always wear woollen stockings? Was so taken with her I almost missed the train. She got into a third-class compartment farther up the train. The others were all bickering in the smoking carriage, so they didn't see her.

I scored over the rest of the crowd when we got to Wolvers. They had all brought heavy portmanteaus, con-

taining all their vacation baggage. My idea was, go light when chasing the Grail. Had only my rucksack, left rest of my stuff at coll., to be forwarded later. While the other chaps were getting their stuff out of the goods van I spotted Miss Flapper getting off the train. She got into a hansom. Just by dumb luck I was standing near. I heard her say to cabby: "318, Bancroft Road!" Lord, was I tickled? I kept mum.

Most of the fellows took cabs, on account of their luggage, but Goblin and I hoofed it. Wolverhampton seems a dingy place for Kathleen to live! Fine old church, though, and lovely market place. We kept our eyes open for Bancroft Road, but saw no sign.

When we got to the Blue Boar, lunch was all ready for us in the coffee room. Landlord tickled to death at our arrival. Wonderful cheddar cheese, and archdeacon ale. We made quite a ceremony of it—all drank Kathleen's health, and on the stroke of two we got up from the table.

All the others beat it off immediately in different directions—looking for Bancroft Road, I expect. I had an idea that more finesse would be needed. I started off with the others, then pretended I had left my pipe, and came back to the Boar. I was going to look up the town directory, to find Kathleen's name—knowing the address, that would be easy. But there was Goblin doing the same thing! We both laughed and looked it up together. The name

at 318, Bancroft Road was Kent, Philip Kent, F. S. A., Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, I suppose: the book put him down as an "antiquarian." Kathleen's father, evidently.

Goblin disappeared in that noiseless way of his, and I lit a pipe and pondered.

The fellows had been full of wild suggestions as to what they would do when they got to 318, Bancroft Road. One was going to be a book agent and get into the house that way. Another said he would be the grocer's man and make friends with the cook. Someone else suggested dressing up as a plumber or gas-man, and going there to fix some imaginary leak. Knowing that the Kents were not fools, I imagined it wouldn't be long before they'd get wise

to the fact that that bunch of dreadnoughts was picketing the house. Probably they'd put the police on them. Also, there's nobody harder to disguise than an English 'varsity man. He gives himself away at every turn. If "Fred" was around he'd be sure to smell a rat. One of those chaps would be likely to fake himself up as a plumber, and get in the house on some pretext or other—still wearing his wrist-watch!

I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to stay away from Bancroft Road for a while and try to pull wires from a distance.

The Blue Boar Inn—a very nice old house, by the way—looks out over the old Wolverhampton market place. In one corner of the square I had noticed a

little post office. You can send a telegram from any post office in England, and I thought that would be my best entering wedge. The word "antiquarian" in the directory had given me a notion. On a blank I composed the following message, after some revisions:

MISS KATHLEEN KENT,
318, Bancroft Road,
WOLVERHAMPTON.

My friend John Blair of Trinity now in Wolverhampton for historical study staying at Blue Boar nice chap American may he call on you if so send him a line sorry can't write hurt hand playing soccer love to all.

JOE.

This was taking a long chance, but was the best move I could think of. I asked the lady behind the counter to

mark the telegram as though it came from Oxford. She said she could not do so, but I happened to have a five-bob piece in my pocket and that persuaded her. I convinced her that it was a harmless joke.

I didn't see that there was anything further to be done immediately. If the telegram brought no word I should have to think up something else. In the meantime, if I was to pose as an antiquarian investigator I had better get up some dope on the history of Wolverhampton. I poked about until I found a bookshop, where I bought a little pamphlet about the town, and studied a map. Bancroft Road was out toward the northern suburbs. A little talk with the bookseller brought me the information that Mr. Kent was

one of his best customers, a pleasant and simple-minded gentleman of sixty whose only hobby was the history of the region. He had written a book called "Memorials of Old Staffordshire," but unfortunately I couldn't get a copy. The bookseller said it was out of print.

Then I went to have a look at St. Philip's Church, a fine old Norman pile with some lovely brasses and crusaders' tombs. Here I had a piece of luck—fell in with the vicar. One of the jolly old port-wine and knickerbocker sort: an old Oxford man, as it happened. I pumped him a little about the history of the church, and in his delight at finding an American who cared for such matters he talked freely. "Why," he kept on saying, with a kind

of pathetic enthusiasm, "I thought all you Americans were interested in was Standard Oil and tinned beef." Finally he invited me over to the vicarage for tea. As I sat by his fire and ate toasted muffins I couldn't help chuckling to think how different this was from the other Scorpions' plan of attack. They were probably all biting their nails up and down Bancroft Road trying to carry the fort by direct assault. It's amazing how things turn out: just as I was wondering how to give the conversation a twist in the right direction, the vicar said:

"If you're really interested in the history of this region you should certainly have a talk with old Mr. Kent. He's our leading antiquarian, and knows more about the Stour Valley than any

one else. He says there was a skirmish fought here in 1645 that all the books have overlooked. The Battle of Wolverhampton, he calls it. He wrote a little pamphlet about it once."

I assured the good parson that my eagerness to know more about the Battle of Wolverhampton was unbounded. I nearly spilled my tea in my excitement.

"Is that Mr. Kent of 318, Bancroft Road?" I asked.

"Yes," answered the vicar. "How did you know?"

"They told me about him at the bookshop."

I explained that I was in Wolverhampton for a day or so only, and finally the excellent man came across with the suggestion I was panting for.

"Well," he said, "as it happens, I have one or two calls to make in that direction this evening. If you care to have me do so, I'll speak to Mr. Kent about you, and he can make an appointment. You said you were stopping at the Blue Boar?"

I thanked him with such warmth that his eyes twinkled.

"My dear fellow," he said, "your enthusiasm does you great credit. I wish you all success in your thesis."

I got back to the Boar feeling that I had done a very good afternoon's work indeed.

VI

THE Scorpions (continues Blair's diary) were all very merry at dinner that night—particularly at my expense. I was the only one who had not been out to Bancroft Road to look over the ground. Apparently they had had a very cheery time.

"Well, Falstaff, what luck?" I asked Carter.

"Splendid!" he replied. "The local butcher has given me a job and I'm going to call there for a meat order tomorrow morning."

"What!" shouted someone. "On Sunday? Not likely!"

I knew mighty well that Carter would not concoct anything as crude as that, and wondered what deviltry he had devised.

"I noticed that two telegrams were delivered at the house this afternoon," said Forbes, in a quiet, non-committal kind of way.

"Perhaps Joe is on his way here," said I. "If so, Good-Night!" As I spoke, I wondered rather anxiously what the *other* telegram could be.

"Well, we saw her, anyway!" said Whitney, "and she's marvellous! She wears a blue tam o' shanter and has an ankle like a fairy tale. We saw her walk down the street."

"That's nothing," I retorted, "I saw her hours ago. She was on the train with us from Birmingham this morning."

This started a furious wrangle. They said I hadn't played fair, as the contest didn't begin until two o'clock. My point was that I had not transgressed the rules as I had done nothing to profit by my accident in seeing her first.

"I couldn't help seeing her, could I?" I asked. "You could have, too, if you hadn't been all frowsting over *Tit-Bits* in the train. And after all, I didn't *know* it was Kathleen. I only suspected it."

I changed the conversation by asking where the Goblin was.

No one had noticed before that he hadn't turned up. This was a bit disconcerting. I secretly thought him the most dangerous competitor. He has a quiet, impish twinkle in his eye,

and an unobtrusive way of getting what he wants. However, the others scoffed at my fears.

Although they all talked a great deal about the amusing time they had had, I could not gather that they had really accomplished much. Forbes claimed to have seen Fred, and said he looked like a rotter. We drank Kathleen's health a couple of times, and then the other three sat down to dummy bridge. I slipped away to the Public Library, partly to get some more of my antiquarian information about Wolverhampton, and partly because I knew my absence would disquiet them.

I found the Library after some difficulty. In the large reading-room I hunted up some books of reference,

but to my disappointment Mr. Kent's volume was out. Looking round for a place to sit, the first person I saw was the Goblin, bent very busily over a book and making notes on a pad of paper. I leaned over him.

"Hello, Goblin," I whispered. "Getting ready for a First?"

He started, and tried to cover his volume with a newspaper, but I had seen it. It was a cook book.

"That's a queer kind of fiction you're mulling over," I remarked.

"I'm looking up a recipe for stuffed eggs," said the Goblin, without a quiver. "Our Common Room steward does them so poorly."

"Well, don't let me interrupt you," I said. I sat down in a corner of the room with a volume of the Britannica.

When I next looked up the Goblin was gone.

As usual, I wasted my time with the encyclopedia. I got interested in the articles on Wages, Warts, Weather, Wordsworth, and Worms. By the time I got to Wolverhampton it was closing time. I did just seize the information that the town was founded in 996 by Wulfruna, widow of the Earl of Northampton. Then I had to leave.

I got back to the Boar about ten-thirty. The coffee-room was empty. The landlord said that Whitney and Forbes were out, but that Mr. Carter had gone upstairs.

Falstaff and I were rooming together, and when I went up I found him reading in bed.

"Hello, Wulfruna!" he said, as I came in.

Evidently he, too, had been reading up some history. Just as I got into bed he fell asleep and his book dropped to the floor with a thump. I crept quietly across the room and picked it up. It was "Memorials of Old Staffordshire," by Philip Kent, F. S. A., the very copy that I had looked for at the Library. I skimmed over it and then put it carefully back by Falstaff's bedside. Was he on the antiquarian trail, too? I began to realize that these rivals of mine would take some beating.

The next morning (Sunday) I found a note waiting for me on the breakfast table. Three indignant Scorpions were weighing it, studying the handwriting,

and examining the stationery like three broken-hearted detectives.

"It's not Kathleen's hand, but I'll swear it's the same notepaper," Forbes was saying.

Under a venomous gaze from all three I took the letter out of the room before opening it. Forbes was right: it was the well-known Bancroft Road notepaper. It ran thus:

318, Bancroft Road,
Wolverhampton
Saturday Evening.

Dear Mr. Blair,

Mr. Dunton, the vicar of S. Philip's, has just told me of your visit to him. I am so glad to know that you take an antiquarian interest in this region. Curiously enough, only this afternoon we had two wires from our cousin Joe in Oxford, one of which mentioned your being here. That gives

us additional reason for looking forward to making your acquaintance.

Mrs. Kent wants you to come to lunch with us to-morrow, at one o'clock. Unfortunately I myself am laid up with rheumatism, but some of the family will be delighted to take you to see the quite surprising relics in this vicinity. Joe has probably told you all about Fred, who is really quite one of the family. The poor fellow needs exercise dreadfully; you must take him with you if you go tramping. Charlie and Oliver, my boys, are away at school.

Don't attempt to reply to this, but just turn up at one o'clock.

Sincerely yours,
PHILIP KENT.

This gave me several reasons for thought, and disregarding the appeals from the coffee-room to come in and tell them all about it, I walked into the courtyard of the Inn to consider.

First, what was the *other* wire from Joe? Heavens, was he on his way from Oxford to Wolverhampton? If my fake telegram were discovered too soon I should be in a very embarrassing position. Second, Joe was a cousin, was he! One of those annoying second cousins, probably, who are close enough to the family to be a familiar figure, and yet far enough away in blood to marry the daughter! And then there was this sinister person, Fred, who was "really quite one of the family." Another cousin, perhaps? What was the matter with the devil, anyway? If he needed exercise why didn't he go and get it? Certainly I didn't want to spend an afternoon antiquarianizing with him. How was I to get him out of the way, so that I could get a tête-à-tête with K.?

I could see that if this game was to be played through successfully it must be played with some daring. *Toujours de l'audace!* I thought, and let breakfast go hang. Moreover, my sudden disappearance would help to demoralize my rivals. I stuck my head into the breakfast-room where Priapus was just dishing out the bacon and eggs. In that instant it struck me again that the Goblin was not there. I cried "Ye Gods!" in a loud voice, and slammed the door behind me. As I ran out of the front door I laughed at the picture of their disconcerted faces.

My idea was to lure Fred away from Bancroft Road at all hazards. This could only be done by another telegram. And as it was Sunday, the railway station was the only place to send one

from. It was a beautiful, clear morning, and I hurried through the streets with exultation, but also with a good deal of nervousness as to the outcome of this shameless hoaxing. At any rate, I thought, I may as well live up to my privileges as an irresponsible American. The Great Kathleen Excursion was beginning to take on in my mind the character of an international joust or tourney.

At the station (or at the depot as one would say at home), I sent the following message:

FREDERICK KENT,
318, Bancroft Road,
WOLVERHAMPTON.

Unavoidably detained Oxford hurt leg playing soccer wish you could join me at once urgent.

JOE.

I got back to the Boar in time for a cold breakfast. None of the others was there. I ate with my antiquarian notes on Wolverhampton propped against the coffee pot. I was determined that Mr. Kent should find me as intelligent as possible.

There was nothing to be done before lunch time. I read Mr. Kent's letter over several times, and I must confess that the mention of that other wire from Joe worried me a good deal. Just how far the telegram I had just sent might conflict with the facts as known to the Kents, I could not surmise. I could only trust to luck and pray for the best. I learned from the chambermaid that the Goblin had come in very late the night before, and had gone out at

six A.M. That bothered me almost more than anything else.

Finally, after hanging round the empty coffee-room for a while, I got nervous, and determined to go to morning service at St. Philip's. There would be plenty of time to get out to Bancroft Road afterward, and perhaps Kathleen would be at church and I could get a distant view of her. I walked round to the church. Service had begun, but I went in and sat down at the back. During a hymn I took a good look round. To my horror I saw in a pew a few feet in front of me a young person whose robust outline seemed familiar. I looked again. It was Falstaff Carter in the get-up of a curate. Trembling with indignation, I crept out of the church. I hardly dared

speculate on what low device he had planned for winning his way into the sanctum.

At any rate, I thought, I am fixed for lunch: once I get there, I guess I can gain ground as fast as any pseudo-curate. I ran over my antiquarian data another time.

It was half-past twelve, and I was just brushing my hair for the third time, preparatory to starting for Bancroft Road, when the chambermaid came to the bedroom door. "This note was just left for you, sir." I tore it open.

BANCROFT ROAD,
Sunday Morning.

MY DEAR MR. BLAIR,

I am afraid you will think it very strange, but, owing to a sudden domestic disarrangement, will you come to *supper*, this evening,

instead of to luncheon? I am exceedingly embarrassed to have to make this change, but (to be quite frank) one of our maids has been taken ill, and our luncheon to-day will have to be a haphazard affair. We are also rather distressed by strange news from our cousin at Oxford.

But we shall be very happy to see you at supper time, seven o'clock.

Cordially yours,
PHILIP KENT.

It came over me that this was pretty dirty work we were putting up on the poor gentleman, and I suddenly felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. I don't know whether any of the others came back to the Boar for lunch, or not. I put on my cap and went for a long walk in the country, out toward Tettenhall Wood. I didn't come back until tea time.

VII

AS JOHNNY BLAIR approached number 318, Bancroft Road, a little before seven o'clock that bland March evening, he bore within his hardy breast certain delicacies, remorses, doubts, and revulsions. But all these were transcended by his overmastering determination to see this superb and long-worshipped maiden near at hand.

Bancroft Road proved to be a docile suburban thoroughfare, lined with comfortable villas and double houses, each standing a little back from the street with a small garden in front. A prim-

rose-coloured afterglow lingered in the sky, and the gas lights along the pavement still burned pale and white. Just as the Rhodes Scholar passed number 302 he saw a feminine figure run down the steps of a house fifty yards farther on, cross the pavement, and drop a letter into the red pillar box standing there. Even at that distance, he distinguished a lively slimness in the girlish outline that could belong to no other than the Incomparable Kathleen. He hastened his step, casting hesitance to the wind. But she had already run back into the house.

It would have added to the problems Mr. Blair was pondering could he have read the letter which had just dropped into the post-box. Perhaps it will somewhat advance the course of the

narrative to give the reader a glimpse of it.

318, Bancroft Road,
Sunday Afternoon.

Dear Joe:

Goodness knows what has happened to this usually placid house. Never again will I complain to you that there is no excitement in Wolverhampton.

I got home from Birmingham yesterday noon and since then everything has been perfectly absurd. I can only believe you have gone balmy.

First comes your wire about Mr. Blair and your having hurt your arm playing soccer. What you can have been doing at soccer I can't conceive. I supposed it was a mistake for hockey, or else some kind of a twit. Well, I couldn't see what I could do to help a historical student but I showed Dad the wire and the old dear said he would write Mr. Blair a line.

I had just settled down to help Mother

with some sewing when along comes your second wire, addressed to her. Mother and I threw up our hands and screamed! Certainly we thought you were off your crumpet. Why on earth should you send us another cook when you know Ethel has been here for so long? I read the wire forward and backward but it could mean nothing else. It said: *Have found very good cook out of place am sending her to you earnestly recommend give her a trial reliable woman but eccentric name Eliza Thick will call Sunday morning.*

Well, we all had a good laugh over this, and wondered what kind of a joke you were up to. Then, after supper, to our amazement, came a third wire—not from you, this one, but to Dad, and who do you suppose from? The Bishop of Oxford if you please! Dad was so flustered (you know how telegrams excite him: they offend all his antiquarian instincts!)—well, the Bishop said—*Am sending my favourite curate to call on you magnificent young fellow*

excellent family very worthy chap will be in Wolverhampton a day or two anxious to have him meet your family.

Well, this rather flabbergasted us, but Dad took it rather as a matter of course, after the first surprise. He used to know the Bishop well—in fact, he dedicated his book to him. "Quite all right, my dear," Dad kept saying. "I dare say the young man has some antiquarian problems to talk over. Too bad I'm so crippled with rheumatism."

After supper along came Mr. Dunton, and began to talk about a charming young American who had been calling on him, and who did it prove to be but your friend Mr. Blair, who had been quite put out of our minds by the later telegrams. So Dad sat down right away and wrote a note to Mr. Blair at the Blue Boar asking him for luncheon to-day, and sent it up by the gardener's boy.

But this morning, when I had just decided not to go to church (you'll see why

in a minute) comes your perfectly mad message to Fred, about hurting your leg at soccer and all the rest of it. This convinced us that you are quite crazy. How could we send Fred all that way alone! And when did you take up soccer anyway?

But we know what a mad creature you are anyway, so we simply suspected some deep-laid twit. Now I come to the queerest thing of all!

Ethel went out last night, for her usual Saturday evening off, and hasn't returned! In all the years she's been with us, Mother says, it's the first time such a thing ever happened. And before breakfast this morning, turns up this Eliza Thick person of yours, with a note from Ethel to say that she was sick but that her friend Eliza would see us through for a day or so. Well, you surely have a queer eye for picking out domestics! Of all the figures of fun I ever imagined, she is the strangest. I don't think she's quite right in her head. I'll tell you all about her when I see you.

Really, I roar with laughter every time I look at her!

I haven't got time to say more. With this Eliza person in the kitchen goodness knows what may happen. We had to send a note to Mr. Blair not to come for luncheon, the house was so upset. We heard a fearful uproar in the lower regions this afternoon and found Eliza engaged in ejecting some kind of gas-man who said he had come to see the meter (on Sunday, if you please!)

Everything seems quite topsy turvy. And Mr. Blair is coming to supper in a few minutes, and that favourite curate of the Bishop's, too. I think I shall have to stay down in the kitchen to see that Eliza Thick gets through with it all right. I can forgive you almost anything except her!

Never, never say again that nothing happens in Bancroft Road!

Yours,

KATHLEEN.

VIII

A RUDDY-CHEEKED housemaid in the correct evening uniform admitted Blair, and in the drawing-room he found Mr. Kent sitting by a shining fire. Points of light twinkled in the polished balls of the brass andirons. As soon as he entered, Blair felt the comely atmosphere of a charming and well-ordered home. Books lined the walls; a French window opened on to the lawn at the far end of the room; a large bowl of blue hyacinths, growing in a bed of pebbles, stood on the reading table. Mr. Kent was small, gray-haired, with

a clear pink complexion and a guileless blue eye.

"Mr. Blair," he said, laying down his paper, "I am very glad to meet you. A friend of Joe's is always welcome here, and particularly when he's an antiquarian. I know you'll excuse our seeming rudeness in putting you off at luncheon."

Blair bowed, and made some polite reply.

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Kent, "my wife was embarrassed this morning by strange happenings in the domestic department. Our cook, usually very faithful, did not turn up, and sent a substitute who has caused her —well, mingled annoyance and amusement. I have not seen the woman myself: my rheumatism has kept me

pretty close to the fire this damp weather; but by all accounts the creature is very extraordinary. Well, well, you are not interested in that, of course. It is very pleasant to meet a fellow antiquarian. How did you happen to visit Wolverhampton? We have a number of quite unusual relics in these parts, but they are not so well known as they should be."

"To tell the truth, sir," said Blair, "it was your book, which I came across in the college library. I was particularly interested in your account of St. Philip's Church, and I made up my mind that I ought to see it. You see, we in America have so little antiquity of our own that these relics of old England are peculiarly fascinating to us."

"Quite so, quite so!" said Mr. Kent, rubbing his hands with pleasure. "Magnificent! Well, well, it is certainly a delight to hear you say so. After supper we will dismiss the ladies and have a good crack. There are some really startling things to be learned about Wolverhampton in Anglo-Saxon times. You know the town lay along the frontier that was much harried by the Danes, and Edward the Elder won a conspicuous victory over the invaders at Tettenhall, which is a village very near here."

"Yes," said Blair, "I walked out there this afternoon."

"Did you, indeed! Well, that was a proof of your perspicacity. You may recall that in my book I referred to the battle at Tettenhall——"

"That was in 910, was it not?" queried Blair, adroitly.

"Precisely. It is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle."

"Edward the Elder died in 924, didn't he?" asked the ruthless American.

"About that time, I think. I don't remember exactly. Upon my word, Mr. Blair, you have taken up history with true American efficiency! I do wish that our young men had the same zeal. I am happy to say, however, that I am expecting a young cleric this evening, a protégé of the Bishop of Oxford, who is, I believe, also interested in these matters."

Blair's heart sank, but he had no time to ponder, for at this moment Mrs. Kent and Kathleen came in.

"My dear, this is Mr. Blair, Joe's

friend from Oxford. We are great cronies already. My wife, Mr. Blair, and my daughter Kathleen."

The young Oxonian suffered one of the most severe heart contusions known in the history of the human race. It was a positive vertigo of admiration. This was indeed the creature he had seen on the railway platform: a dazzling blend of girl and woman. The grotesque appellation "flapper" fled from his mind. Her thick, dark hair was drawn smoothly across her head and piled at the back in a heavenly coil. Her clear gray eyes, under rich brown brows, were cool, laughing, and self-possessed. She was that most adorable of creatures, the tweenie, between girl and woman, with the magic of both and the weaknesses of neither. Blair

could not have said how she was dressed. He saw only the arch face, the intoxicating clearness of her skin, the steady, friendly gaze.

"How do you do," he said, and remembering English reticence, hesitated to put out his hand; then cursed himself for not having done so.

Kathleen smiled, and murmured, "How do you do."

"I'm very glad to see you," said Mrs. Kent. "Do tell us what that crazy Joe has been up to. Did Mr. Kent tell you we've had three telegrams from her?"

Blair felt the room twirl under his feet. How one little pronoun can destroy a man! In his agony he saw Mrs. Kent and Kathleen sit down on the big couch, and painfully found his way to a chair.

"I—I beg your pardon?" he stammered. "I didn't just catch——"

"The mad girl has sent us three telegrams," said Mrs. Kent, "in which there was only one sensible thing, the reference to yourself. Her other remarks, about cooks and soccer and injured limbs, were quite over our heads."

With a dull sense of pain Blair felt Kathleen's bright eyes on him.

"Yes, Mr. Blair, is she ragging us? Or have the girls at Maggie Hall taken up soccer?" said a clear voice, every syllable of which seemed so precious and girlish and quaintly English that he could have clapped his hands.

He blessed her for the clue. "Maggie Hall!"—in other words, Lady Margaret Hall, one of the women's

colleges at Oxford. So "Joe" was (in American parlance) a "co-ed!"

"Why—er—I believe they *have* been playing a little," he said desperately. "I think he—er—something was said about having his—hum—her—arm—hurt in a rough game."

"Her leg, too," said Mr. Kent. "In my time, young girls didn't send telegrams about their legs. In fact, they didn't send telegrams at all."

"Well, we are quite nonplussed," said Mrs. Kent. "Kathleen says Joe must have had a rush of humour to the head. She wired for us to send Fred down to her. Of course she has sent wires to Fred before, as a joke; but she must have known we couldn't send him so far alone. I suppose Joe

has told you all about Fred? He's quite one of the family."

"Yes," said the distracted Oxonian. "He must be a fine fellow. I'm very anxious to meet him."

There was a ring at the front door bell, and in a kind of stupor Blair realized that something—he hardly knew what—was about to happen.

"The Reverend Mr. Carter," announced the maid.

Blair had a keen desire to scream, but he kept his eyes firmly on the rug until he had mastered himself. In the general movement that followed he had presence of mind enough to seize a chair next to Kathleen. He saw Falstaff's burly figure enter, habited as the conventional "black beetle" of the church, and in the

sharpened state of his wits noticed that the unpractised curate had put on his clerical collar the wrong way round. He rejoiced in Carter's look of dismay on finding his fellow-Scorpion already on the battlefield.

"Mr. Carter," said Mr. Kent, "this is Mr. Blair, of Trinity."

The two shook hands gravely.

Blair determined to make use of his hard-won information to set Carter astray.

"I know Mr. Carter by reputation," he said. "I have heard Joe speak of him in terms of great admiration."

The curate looked worried, but tried to play safe.

"Oh, yes, Joe!" he said. "Splendid chap."

Blair made haste to get back to the

chair he coveted. He had no idea what mad schemes might lurk beneath Carter's episcopalian frock, and was determined to gain any headway he could.

"It seems funny your coming to Wolverhampton," said Kathleen. "So few 'varsity men ever get here. But it's certainly a blessing for Dad. He'll talk antiquities with you as long as you like."

"Are you interested in the subject?" asked Blair.

"I'm afraid not," she laughed. "It's too bad Dad is so laid up with his lumbago. He'd love to walk you out to Tettenhall and Boscobel, to see his burial mounds."

"How very interesting!" said Blair. "A kind of private family cemetery?"

"Oh, dear no," declared Kathleen in amazement. "Antiquities, you know, where the Danes buried themselves."

"Of course, of course. How I wish I could see them! Are you fond of walking?"

"Yes, when it isn't too muddy. It's been too wet lately to go out with Fred. He loves a good long walk, but he's getting old and his rheumatism bothers him."

"I dare say he may have inherited that from your father?"

"It's very common among Scotties," said Kathleen.

"Oh, is your family Scotch?" said Blair, feverishly trying to be polite.

"Our family?" queried Kathleen with a smile. "Heavens, no! I thought

you were talking about Fred. You must see him, he's somewhere around."

"I should love to meet him," said Blair.

Kathleen went to the door and whistled. There was a scampering on the stairs, and a grizzled Skye terrier trotted into the room. Blair and Carter looked at each other sheepishly.

Mr. Kent had been referring to his watch several times, and Blair began to suspect that something was wrong. But just then supper was announced. As they passed into the dining-room, the American thought he noticed signs of agitation on the maid's face. He wondered secretly what the rest of the Scorpions were up to.

IX

"COME, Mr. Blair," said Mrs. Kent; "you sit there, next to Mr. Kent, where you can talk about archæology. Mr. Carter tells me he knows nothing about such subjects, so he will have to amuse Kathleen and me."

"What errand brings you to Wolverhampton, Mr. Carter?" inquired Blair, thinking to unmask his opponent's weapons as quickly as possible.

Carter was a little staggered by this, but his effrontery was up to the test.

"The Bishop sent me down," he said,

"to look over the surrounding parishes with a view to establishing a chapel in the suburbs."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Mr. Kent. "But surely this does not lie in the Oxford diocese?"

"Quite true," said Carter. "The Bishop had to get special permission from Parliament. An old statute of the fourteenth century, I believe."

"Indeed! Indeed!" cried Mr. Kent. "How absorbing! My dear Mr. Carter, you must tell me more about that. I take it you are something of a historical student, after all."

"I'm afraid not, sir," replied Carter. "My studies in divinity have been too exacting to leave much opportunity——"

"You must not believe Mr. Carter's disclaimers," said Blair. "I have

heard of his papers before the Oxford Historical Society. He has a very sound antiquarian instinct. I think you would find his ideas of great interest."

"We were speaking of the battle with the Danes at Tettenhall," observed Mr. Kent, turning to Blair. "I think that if Kathleen could arrange to take you out there you would find the burial mounds of unusual interest. My dear, could you walk out there with Mr. Blair to-morrow morning?"

Kathleen assented, but Blair noticed that she was not eating her soup. He also noticed that the maid, in the background, was seized with occasional spasms, which he was at a loss to interpret.

"Did I hear you say Tettenhall?"

ventured Carter. "That is the very place the Bishop mentioned to me. He was particularly anxious that I should go there."

"You must come with us, by all means," said Kathleen.

"Bravo," said Mr. Kent, beaming genially upon the young people. "I wish I could go with you. You know they say Wulfruna, the widow of the Earl of Northampton, who founded Wolverhampton, had a kind of summer place once near Tettenhall, and I claim to have located—— By the way, my dear, what do you suppose has happened to this soup?"

"I think that Eliza Thick has a heavy hand with the condiments," said Mrs. Kent. "You may take away now, Mary."

"As I recall, Wulfruna founded the town about 996," observed Blair. "I presume it takes its name from her?"

"Exactly—Wulfruna-hampton. Really, Mr. Blair, your historical knowledge does you honour. I had no idea that Americans were such keen students of the past."

Blair began to think that he had overplayed his hand, for he noticed that Falstaff was getting in some private conversation with Kathleen. He attempted to catch her eye to ask a question, but Mr. Kent was now well launched on his hobby.

"Wulfruna was descended from Ethelhild, who was a granddaughter of Alfred the Great. You recall that the Etheling Ethelwold, the son of Alfred's brother Ethelred, took sides

with the Danes. To stem the invasion, Edward and his sister Ethelfled——"

"Ethel fled, that's just the trouble," interposed Mrs. Kent. "Kathleen, my dear, do run downstairs and see what's wrong in the kitchen. I'm afraid Eliza is in difficulties again. Mr. Blair, you and Mr. Carter must excuse this irregularity. Our substitute cook is a very strange person."

Kathleen left the room, and it seemed to Blair as though the sparkle had fled from the glasses, the gleam of candlelight from the silver. Across the cloth he had watched her—girlish, debonair, and with a secret laughter lurking in her eyes. And yet he had not had a chance to exchange half a dozen sentences with her.

The maid reëntered, whispered

something to Mrs. Kent, and began to place the dishes for the next course.

"Kathleen begs to be excused," said Mrs. Kent. "She thinks she had better stay in the kitchen to help Eliza."

"Oh, I say," cried the curate. "That's too bad. Do you think I could help, Mrs. Kent? I'm a very good cook. The Bishop himself has praised my—er—my——"

"Your what?" asked Blair.

"My ham and eggs," retorted the cleric.

"Perhaps you will let me wash the dishes," suggested Blair. "I should be only too happy to assist. I feel very embarrassed at having intruded upon you at so inconvenient a time."

"I should not dream of such a thing,"

said Mrs. Kent. "I believe that Eliza is perfectly capable, but as Joe said, she is eccentric."

"I am quite accustomed to washing dishes," said Carter. "In fact, the Bishop always used to ask me to do it for him."

"Dear me," remarked Mr. Kent, "surely the Bishop has plenty of servants to help in such matters?"

Blair applied himself to the food on his plate to which he had helped himself almost unconsciously. He well knew the daring hardihood of his rival, and feared that the other might find some excuse to follow Kathleen to the kitchen. As he raised his fork to his lips, suddenly his hand halted. The dish was stuffed eggs. His mind reverted to the Public Library the even-

ing before. Was it possible that the Goblin——?

He determined that the first thing to be done was to get Carter so firmly engaged with Mr. Kent that the wolf in cleric's clothing could not withdraw. Then perhaps he himself could frame some excuse for seeing what was going on downstairs.

"Mr. Kent," he said, "you should draw out Mr. Carter concerning his views on amending the liturgy of the Established Church. He has some very advanced ideas on that subject which have attracted much attention at Oxford. One of his interesting suggestions is that radical churchmen should wear the clerical collar back side foremost, as a kind of symbol of their inverted opinions."

The wretched Carter's hand flew to his neck, and he glared across the table in a very unecclesiastical manner.

"Really!" said Mr. Kent, "that is most interesting. I had noticed his modification of the customary dress. In what other ways, Mr. Carter, would you amend the ritual?"

The unfortunate curate was caught.

"Er—hum—well—that is, the Bishop and I both think that the service is too long," he faltered. "I am in favour of omitting the sermon."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Kent. "It is most refreshing to hear a high churchman make such a confession. And what else do you propose?"

"Why—ah—hum—it has always seemed to me that the—thirty-nine

articles might—well—be somewhat condensed."

"Bravo indeed, though I fear the Bishop would balk at that," said his host.

The maid, appearing in the dining-room again, whispered to Mrs. Kent.

"Philip," said the latter, "that gas-man is here again, and says he *must* see the meter. He claims that there is a dangerous leak which should be fixed at once. Perhaps I had better go down to the cellar with him. Your rheumatism——"

"My dear Mrs. Kent," cried the curate, seeing his chance; "do nothing of the sort. It is the privilege of my cloth to take precedence when there is danger of any kind. If any one should be overcome by fumes, the consolations

of the church may be needed." And without waiting for another word, he leaped up and ran from the room.

Blair fidgeted in his chair, seeing himself outwitted, but there was nothing he could do.

"Pray go on with your supper, Mr. Blair," urged Kent. "You must overlook anything that seems strange this evening. Everything seems to be widdershins. Perhaps because it is St. Patrick's Day. I do believe that woman in the kitchen is at the bottom of it all. These stuffed eggs are positively uneatable! If I were not crippled with this lumbago I would go down and fire her out of the house."

"Let me do it for you!" cried Blair, half rising from his seat.

"Nonsense! I'm not going to sacri-

fice our good talk on antiquities so easily. I want very much to tell you about the Battle of Wolverhampton. The town was strongly loyalist in the great rebellion; in fact, in 1645 it was the headquarters of Prince Rupert, while Charles the First is said to have stopped at the Blue Boar for a drink——"

At this moment came a ring at the front door, and Mr. Kent stopped to listen. They heard a male voice mumbling to the maid, who then came to her mistress to report.

"There's a policeman out here, ma'am, to see Mr. Kent."

"A policeman?" queried the antiquarian. "What next, I wonder? Well, supper is suspended, send him in."

And to Blair's dismay the gigantic form of Whitney, the Iron Duke, crossed the threshold, in the correct uniform of the Wolverhampton police force.

If Blair was dismayed, the counterfeit policeman was no less disgusted to see his fellow Scorpion sitting at the dinner table, but they gazed at each other without any sign of recognition.

"Begging your pardon for interrupting, sir, but the chief sent me around for a word with you. There's been a gang o' sneak thieves operating 'round 'ere, sir, and some of 'em 'as been getting admittance to 'ouses by passin' themselves off as gas inspectors, sir."

Mrs. Kent screamed.

"I 'ad a notion that one o' these

birds is along Bancroft Road to-night, sir, an' I wanted to warn you. Don't let the maid admit any tradesmen or agents from the gas company unless they 'as the proper badges, sir."

"Heavens, Philip!" cried Mrs. Kent. "That dreadful man is downstairs now! Eliza threw him out once this afternoon, but he's here again. He may have murdered Mr. Carter by this time. Oh, inspector, do hurry down at once and see what's happened! There's a defenceless high-church curate in the cellar with him. Mary, show the way downstairs."

Blair poured out a glass of water for Mrs. Kent.

"Don't you think I had better go down, too?" he asked.

"Oh, please don't go!" begged Mrs.

Kent, faintly. "Stay here, in case he should escape upstairs. I believe we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Come, come," said Mr. Kent. "We mustn't let all this spoil Mr. Blair's supper. Have another glass of wine. The policeman will attend to the gas-man. We don't often get a chance to talk to a genuine antiquarian. I think, Mr. Blair, that you will be greatly interested in the architectural restoration of our parish church. It exemplifies the worst excesses of the mid-Victorian period. The church itself is one of the finest examples of the cruciform type. The south transept dates from the thirteenth century; the nave, clerestory, and north transept from the fifth. The chancel was restored in 1865, but I must con-

fess that the treatment of the clerestory seems to me barbarous. Now what are your own ideas as to the proper treatment of a clerestory?"

The wretched American was nonplussed. He had a shrewd suspicion that matters were moving rapidly downstairs yet he did not see any way of leaving the dining-room to investigate for himself. He had hardly heard what was said.

"Why—ah—to tell you the truth, Mr. Kent, I read very little fiction nowadays. I'm rather worried about that gas-man downstairs. Do you suppose your daughter can be in any danger? There might be some sort of explosion—don't you think I had better run down to see if I can help?"

As they sat listening Kathleen's

voice was heard from the kitchen, raised in clear and angry tones.

Blair could contain himself no longer. With an inarticulate apology he hurried out of the room, leaving the puzzled antiquarian and his wife alone at the supper table.

X

THE Rhodes Scholar was correct in having feared the Goblin as a dangerous competitor in the quest of the Grail. King, as we have intimated before, was a quaint-minded and ingenious person, modest in stature but with a twinkling and roving eye. He was one of the leading spirits of the OUDS, known in full as the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and his ability to portray females of the lower classes had been the delight of more than one Shakespearean rendering. No one who saw him as Juliet's nurse in a certain private theatrical per-

formance in the hall of New College can recall the occasion without chuckles.

When the Goblin left the Blue Boar on Saturday afternoon he also made his way out to Bancroft Road; but instead of patrolling the main street in the vague hope of catching a glimpse of Kathleen (as did Falstaff, Priapus, and the Iron Duke), he hunted out the hinder regions of the district. In accordance with a plan he had concocted before leaving Oxford, he carried a little portfolio of "art subjects," of the kind dear to domestic servants, and with this in hand he approached the door of the basement back kitchen, where Ethel the cook and her assistant, Mary, the housemaid, were having a mid-after-

noon cup of tea. The windings of the humbler lanes of service, behind the Bancroft Road houses, were the proper causeway for tradesmen, and it was easy for him to reach the back garden gate unseen by those in front.

He knocked respectfully at the kitchen door, and Mary came to answer.

"Good day, Miss," said the supposed pedlar. "I 'ave some very pretty pictures 'ere which I wish you would let me show you."

Mary was a simple-minded creature, but she knew that her mistress had strict rules about pedlars.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but Missus don't let no pedlars in the house."

"If you please, Miss," said the artful Goblin, "I am no pedlar, but rep-

resenting a very respectable photographer, and I would like to show you some photographs in the 'ope of getting your order. I 'ave taken a number of orders at the nicest 'ouses along Bancroft Road. I thought maybe you would like to 'ave a photo of yourself taken, to send to your young man." And he opened his case, exhibiting a sheaf of appropriate photos.

It was a slender chance, but the pedlar had a wheedling eye and a genteel demeanour, and Mary hesitated. She called the cook, a stout, middle-aged person, who came to the door to see what was up. The pedlar rapidly showed the best items of his collection, which he had selected with great care in a photographer's studio in Oxford. Fate hung in the scales,

but the two servants could not resist temptation. They knew that Mrs. Kent and Miss Kathleen were upstairs sewing; and the master was confined to his study with his rheumatism. They invited the photographer into the kitchen.

It is a psychological fact well known to housekeepers that there is a vacant hour in the middle of the afternoon when Satan sometimes finds a joint in the protective armour of the domestic servant. After the luncheon dishes are washed and put away, and before five-o'clock tea and toast are served, cook and housemaid enjoy a period of philosophic contemplation or siesta. Even in the most docile and kitchen-broken breast thoughts of roses and romance may linger; dreams

of moving pictures or the coming cotillion of the Icemen's Social Harmony. Usually this critical time is whiled away by the fiction of Nat Gould or Bertha Clay or Harold Bell Wright. And close observers of kitchen comedy will have noted that it is always at this fallow hour of the afternoon that pedlars and other satanic emissaries sharpen their arrows and ply their most plausible seductions.

The Goblin has never admitted just what honeyed sophistries he employed to win the hearts of the simple pair in Mrs. Kent's kitchen. But the facts may be briefly stated by the chronicler. After getting them interested in his photos he confessed frankly that he was an old friend of the family from Oxford. He said that he and

Miss Kathleen were planning an innocent practical joke on the family, and asked if he could take the place of one of the servants for that Sunday. He made plain that his share in the joke must not be revealed to any one. And then he played his trump card by showing them the text of the bogus telegram recommending Miss Eliza Thick, which he had dispatched from a branch postal office on his way through the town.

"And is Miss Josephine in the joke, too?" inquired the cook.

This question startled the Goblin, but he kept his composure and affirmed that he and Miss Josephine had concocted the telegram jointly in Oxford. And by a little adroit pumping he learned "Joe's" status

in the family. The cook, Ethel, admitted that she was to go out that evening for her Saturday night off. At last the Goblin, by desperate cunning and the exhibition of two golden sovereigns, completely won the hearts of the maids. While they were talking the door-bell rang, and Mary, returning from the upper regions, announced that it was "another telegram from Miss Joe. Missus and Miss Kathleen laughed fit to kill when they read it," she said.

"You see?" said the Goblin. "That's the same telegram I just showed you. It's all right; it's a joke. You don't need to worry, cook. Mrs. Kent won't be angry with you. You let me take your place for tomorrow, and write a little note saying

you're ill and that your friend Eliza Thick will do your work for the day."

It was arranged that the Goblin should meet Ethel at her home that night to borrow some clothes. The cook showed him the menu for Sunday that Mrs. Kent had sent down. This rather daunted the candidate for kitchen honours, but he copied it in his notebook for intensive study. Then, as it was close upon tea-time, he packed up the photos, distributed his largesse, and retired. Mary, the housemaid, promised to stand by him in the coming ordeal. Both the servants felt secretly flattered that they should be included in the hoax. The kitchen classes in England have great reverence for young 'varsity men.

The Goblin was a canny man, and

he had brought with him a wig and certain other properties. He hunted out a little tea shop, where he meditated over three cups of pekoe and hot buttered toast. Then he made his way to the Public Library, where he spent several hours over a cook-book. He was complimenting himself on having shaken the other Scorpions off his trail when Blair looked over his shoulder and caught a glimpse of the stuffed-eggs recipe to which the Goblin was addressing himself for the fourth time. The meeting was embarrassing, but it could not be helped. After Blair had left him, the cook-to-be returned to his memoranda.

Mrs. Kent trusted many things to Ethel's judgment, and her instructions as jotted down on a slip of

paper included three possibilities. "*Eggs, stuffed, devilled, or farci,*" she had written, and the Goblin was endeavouring to decide which of these presented the least distressing responsibility. He was a student of mathematics, and had attempted to reduce the problem to a logical syllabus. He read over his memoranda:

THEOREM: STUFFED EGGS.

Data: six hard, boiled-eggs (20 minutes).

(a) Cut eggs in halves lengthwise.

(b) Remove yolks, and put whites aside in pairs.

(c) Mash yolks, and add

(1) Half the amount of devilled ham.

(2) Enough melted butter to make of consistency to shape.

("Half *what* amount of devilled ham?" thought the Goblin. "And where does the devilled ham come from? How does one devil a ham? What a pity Henry James

never wrote a cook-book! It would have been lucid compared to this. *To make of consistency to shape*—what on earth does that mean?")

(d) Clean and chop two chickens' livers, sprinkle with onion juice, and sauté in butter—

("No!" he cried, "that's *eggs farci*. Wrong theorem!")

(d) Make in balls ("Make *what* in balls?") size of original yolks ("Note: remember to measure original yolks before cutting them lengthwise").

(e) Refill whites ("Let's see, what did I fill 'em with before?").

(f) Form remainder of mixture into a nest. ("That's a nice little homely touch.")

(g) Arrange eggs in the nest and

(1) Pour over one cup White Sauce. ("Memo: See p. 266 for White Sauce.")

(2) Sprinkle with buttered crumbs. ("Allow plenty of time for

buttering those crumbs; that sounds rather ticklish work.")

(3) Bake until crumbs are brown.

(h) Garnish with a border of toast points and a wreath of parsley.

Q. E. D.

"Integral calculus is a treat compared to this," he said to himself as he reviewed the problem. "I hope they have plenty of parsley in the house. That nest may need a little protecting foliage. I don't see how I can make any kind of proper asylum for those homeless, wandering eggs out of that mess." So saying, he left the library to call upon Ethel at her home and complete his disguise.

XI

MRS. KENT was a deal puzzled by the bearing and accoutrements of her substitute cook. ElizaThick appeared on the premises about seven o'clock, and with the aid of the housemaid breakfast went through fairly smoothly. It was Kathleen's query about the coffee that elicited the truth. Mary, with nervous gigglings, announced to her mistress that Ethel was ill and had sent a substitute. The coincidence that Josephine's nominee should turn out to be a friend of Ethel struck Mrs. Kent as strange, and presently she went down to interview the new kitcheneer.

Eliza Thick, a medium-sized but rather powerfully fashioned female, generously busted and well furnished with rich brown hair, was washing the dishes. She curtseyed respectfully as Mrs. Kent entered the kitchen.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Kent. "You are Eliza Thick?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You brought a note from Ethel?"

"Yes, ma'am;" and fumbling in an opulent bosom, Eliza drew forth a crumpled scrap of paper.

"I had a telegram from my niece in Oxford recommending you. How did she know of you?"

"I worked at Lady Marg'ret 'All, ma'am, where the young lady is studyin'."

"Why did you leave your place there?"

"If you please, ma'am, my dishes was so tasty that it made the young ladies discontented when they got 'ome. Their parents complained that it gave 'em too 'igh ideas about wittles. The principal said I was pamperin' 'em too much, an' offered to release me."

Mary, who was listening, gave a loud snort of laughter, which she tried to conceal by rattling some plates.

"Well, Eliza," said Mrs. Kent, "that will do. You must get on with the work as best you can. Judging by the coffee this morning, I don't think your cooking will have the same effect on us that it did on the students at Lady Margaret Hall. We were

expecting a guest for lunch but I will have to put him off until supper. I have written out the menu for the day. Mary will give you any help she can."

"If you please, ma'am?" said Eliza.

"Yes?"

"Cook gave me a message for Miss Kathleen, ma'am, which she asked me to deliver in person."

"A message for Miss Kathleen?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, you can tell me, I will tell Miss Kathleen."

"Cook said I was to give it to her personally," said the persistent Eliza.

"How very extraordinary," said Mrs. Kent. "What did you say was the matter with Ethel—is it anything contagious?"

"Oh, no, ma'am, I think it's just a

touch of—of nervous debility, ma'am—too many white corpuscles, ma'am."

"Well, I don't think Miss Kathleen can come down now, Eliza; we have just had a very strange telegram which has rather upset us."

"Yes, ma'am."

The new cook sat down to peel potatoes and study the mechanics of Kitchencraft. She found much to baffle her in the array of pots and pans, and in the workings of the range. From a cupboard she took out mince-meat choppers, potato mashers, cream whippers, egg-beaters, and other utensils, gazing at them in total ignorance of their functions. Mrs. Kent had indicated jugged hare and mashed potatoes for lunch, and after some scrutiny of the problem

Eliza found a hammer in the cabinet with which she began to belabour the vegetables. Mary, who might have suggested boiling the potatoes first, was then upstairs.

By and by Kathleen heard the thumping, and came into the kitchen to investigate.

"Good morning, Eliza."

"Good morning, Miss," said the delighted cook. "Oh, I *am* so happy to see you, Miss!"

"Thank you, Eliza. Did you have a message for me from Ethel?"

"Yes, Miss. Er—Ethel said she hoped you'd give me all the help you can, Miss, because—er, you see, Miss, cooking for a private family is very different from working in a college where there are so many, Miss."

"I see. Well—what on earth are you doing to those potatoes, Eliza?"

"Mashing 'em, Miss."

"What, with a *hammer!*"

"I washed the 'ammer, Miss."

"Surely you didn't mash them that way at Maggie Hall, Eliza?"

"Yes, miss. The young ladies got so they couldn't abide them done any other way."

Kathleen looked more closely, and examined the badly bruised tubers. "Good gracious," she exclaimed, with a ripple of laughter. "They haven't been cooked yet!"

Eliza was rather taken aback.

"Well, you see, Miss," she said, "at the college we used nothing but fireless cookers, and I don't understand these old-fashioned stoves very well. I

wanted to get you to explain it to me."

"It's perfectly simple," said Kathleen. "This is the oven, and when you want to bake anything—— *Phew!*" she cried, opening the oven door, "what *have* you got in here?"

She took a cloth, and lifted out of the oven a tall china pitcher with a strange-looking object protruding from it.

Eliza was panic stricken, and for an instant forgot her rôle.

"My God! I put the hare in there and forgot all about it. What a bally sell!"

Kathleen removed the hideous thing, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"Look here, Eliza," she said. "They may jug hares that way at Maggie

Hall, but I doubt it. Now, what *can* you cook? We've got guests coming to-night. A gentleman from America is going to be here and we must put our best foot forward."

Eliza's face was a study in painful emotion.

"Excuse me, Miss," she said, "but is that American gentleman called Mr. Blair?"

"Yes," said Kathleen. "Really, Eliza, you are most extraordinary. How did you know?"

"I've heard of him," said Eliza. "I think I ought to warn you against him, miss. He's—he's a counterfeiter."

"Nonsense, Eliza. What notions you do have! He's an antiquarian, and he's coming to see my father about archæology. He's a friend of Miss

Josephine, from Oxford. Now I think you'd better get on with your cooking and not worry about counterfeiters."

"Miss Kathleen," said Eliza, "I think I'd better be frank with you. I want to tell you——"

Here Mary came into the kitchen, and although Eliza Thick made frantic gestures to her to keep away, the housemaid was too dense to understand. The opportunity for confession was lost.

"Now, Eliza," said Kathleen, "Mary will help you in anything you're not certain about. I'll come down again later to see how you're getting on."

By supper time that night Eliza Thick began to think that perhaps she had made a tactical error by interning herself in the kitchen where there was

but small opportunity for a tête-à-tête with the bewitching Kathleen. The news that Blair was coming to the evening meal was highly disconcerting, and the worried cook even contemplated the possibility of doctoring the American's plate of soup with ratsbane or hemlock. Once during the afternoon she ventured a sally upstairs (carrying a scuttle of coal as a pretext) in the vague hope of finding Kathleen somewhere about the house. Unfortunately she met Mrs. Kent on the stairs, who promptly ordered her back to her proper domain. Here Eliza found a disreputable-looking person trying to cozen Mary into admitting him to the house. He claimed to be an agent of the gas company, in search of a rumoured leak. Eliza immediately spotted Priapus, and in-

dignantly ejected him by force of arms. In the scuffle a dish pan and several chairs were overturned. Mary, whose nerves were rather unstrung by the sustained comedy she was witnessing, uttered an obbligato of piercing yelps which soon brought Kathleen to the scene. Eliza received a severe rating, and so admired the angry sparkle in Kathleen's eyes that she could hardly retort.

"One other thing, Eliza," said Kathleen, in conclusion. "There are to be two guests at supper. Mr. Carter, a curate from Oxford, is coming, too. Please allow for him in your preparations."

"If you please, Miss," cried the much-goaded cook, "is that Mr. Stephen Carter?"

"I believe it is," said Kathleen, "but what of it? Is he a counterfeiter, too?"

"Miss Kathleen, I know you think it strange, but I must warn you against that curate. Dear Miss Kathleen, he is dangerous. He is not what he seems."

"Eliza, you forget yourself," said Kathleen, severely. "Mr. Carter comes with an introduction from the Bishop of Oxford. I hope that is satisfactory to you! In any case, we do not need your approval for our list of guests. Mrs. Kent wants you to take great care with the stuffed eggs. Those mashed potatoes made her quite ill."

"Please, Miss, I'm dreadful worried about those eggs. The book says to make a nest for 'em, and truly I don't know how to go about it. The young

ladies at college never ate their eggs in nests, miss. And when I gets nervous I can't do myself justice, Miss. I never can remember which is the yolks and which is the whites, miss."

"Now, that will do, Eliza," said Kathleen. "You are a very eccentric creature, but I don't think you are as stupid as all that. What do you want? Do you expect me to come down here and oversee all your preparations?"

"Oh, if you only would, Miss, it would be *so* gratifying!"

Kathleen laughed, a girlish bubbling of pure mirth, which was dreadful torment to the jealous masquerader. She departed, leaving the cook a prey to savage resolve. "Well," thought Eliza, "if the supper is bad enough I

guess she'll just *have* to come down and help me. Thank goodness Blair and Carter are *both* coming; they'll cut each other's throats, and perhaps the stuffed eggs will win after all. As for that gas-man, he won't get into this house unless it's over my dead body!"

XII

IT WAS a feverish and excited Eliza that Kathleen found in the kitchen when she tripped downstairs after the soup course. On a large platter the cook had built a kind of untidy thicket of parsley and chopped celery, eked out with lettuce leaves. Ambushed in this were lurking a number of very pallid and bluish-looking eggs, with a non-descript stuffing bulging out of them.

"I forgot to measure the yolks, Miss," wailed Eliza. "That's why the stuffing don't fit. Shall I throw a dash of rum on board to stiffen 'em up?"

In spite of her vexation, Kathleen

could not help laughing. "No, no," she said. "We'll tidy up the nest a bit and send them upstairs."

"That's grand," said Eliza, watching Kathleen's quick fingers. "'Tis a beautiful comely hand you have, miss, one that it's a pleasure to admire."

"Now, Eliza," said Kathleen, "you must not shout up the dumb waiter so. I distinctly heard you cry out *'This plate's for the parson!'* as you sent up one of the dishes of soup."

"If you please, Miss," said Eliza. "That was because it was the plate I spilled a spoonful of pepper into, and I thought it had better go to the cloth than anywhere else. Miss Kathleen, I have something very urgent to say to you before them two counterfeiters

upstairs commit any affidavits or sworn statements."

"You dish out the eggs, Eliza," said Kathleen, "and I'll send them up the dumb waiter. Quick, now! And where's your dessert? Is it ready?"

"All doing finely, Miss," answered Eliza, but as she opened the oven door her assurance collapsed. She drew out a cottage pudding, blackened and burnt to carbon.

"A great success," said the bogus cook, but holding it on the other side of her apron so that Kathleen could not see. "Here, I'll just shoot it up the shaft myself before it gets cold." She hurried into the pantry, whisked it into the dumb waiter before Kathleen could catch a glimpse, and sent it flying aloft.

"That smelt a little burnt, cook," said Kathleen.

"Just a wee bit crisp on one side, miss."

Kathleen was in the pantry, with her nose up the dumb-waiter shaft, sniffing the trail of the cottage pudding and wondering whether she ought to recall it for inspection, when Eliza, turning toward the back door, saw the gas-man on the threshold. The cook's mind moved rapidly in this emergency. She knew that if Priapus found himself face to face with Kathleen, dangerous exposures would follow at once.

"Mary," she whispered to the maid, who had just come down from upstairs, "run tell the Mistress the gas-man is here again. I'll send him down the cellar." And while Kathleen was still

in the pantry and before the pseudo gas-man could demur, Eliza seized him by the coat and hurried him across the kitchen to the cellar door. She opened this and pointed downstairs. The bewildered gas-man disappeared down the steps and Eliza closed the door and turned the key.

"Now, Miss," said Eliza. "I have something very serious to say to you——"

Just at that moment she saw the clerical black of the Reverend Mr. Carter coming down the kitchen stairs.

"—and that is, we'd best get this fruit up without delay," and seizing a large bowl of apples, oranges, and bananas, she passed it to Kathleen and backed her into the pantry again.

Kathleen unsuspectingly pushed the fruit up the dumb waiter and meanwhile it took no more than an instant for Eliza to take the curate by the arm, motion him to silence, and push him toward the cellar door.

"He's down there," she whispered, and Carter innocently followed his fellow Scorpion. Again Eliza closed the door and turned the key.

"Well, Eliza," said Kathleen, "I don't think you're much of a cook, but you're a willing worker."

"Miss Kathleen," said the cook, who was now more anxious than ever to cleanse her bosom of much perilous stuff, "are you very down on practical jokes?"

"Practical jokes? Why, yes, Eliza. I think they are the lowest form of

humour. Good gracious! I do believe we've forgotten the coffee! Have you got it ready?"

"Yes, Miss; yes, Miss; right here," said Eliza, bustling to the stove. "But don't you think, miss, that a frank confession atones for a great deal?"

"Really, Eliza, you are the most priceless creature! I don't wonder Joe was taken with you! Hush! There's the front-door bell; what do you suppose that is?"

They both listened, Kathleen at the dumb-waiter shaft and Eliza at the kitchen door. Eliza started to say something, but Kathleen waved her to be quiet. A heavy step sounded on the stair, and the agitated Mary appeared, followed by a huge policeman. Eliza, of course, recognized the

Iron Duke, but the gas-light and the disguise prevented the latter from knowing his fellow venturer.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Kathleen.

"Please, Miss," said the blue-coat, "your mother said there's a gas-man down here and I've been sent by headquarters to take him in charge. I think he's a sneak thief."

"There's no such person here, officer," said Kathleen.

Eliza still kept her sovereign wits about her. She advanced to the policeman, and whispering mysteriously "He's in here," took his sleeve and led him to the cellar door.

"He's down there," she repeated; "put the cuffs on him, quick!" She opened the door, and the doubtful

policeman, hypnotized by her decision, stepped on to the cellar stairs. The door closed behind him, and again Eliza turned the key.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Kathleen, angrily. "Has everybody gone daft? Eliza, ever since you came into the house, there has been nothing but turmoil. I wish you would explain. Why have you sent the policeman into the cellar?"

"There's three dangerous counterfeiters down there, Miss," said Eliza. "I want to tell you the truth about this, Miss Kathleen, before that American gets down here—he's bound to be here soon. He's the worst of the lot."

"Open that door at once!" said Kathleen, stamping her foot. "I don't

know what on earth you mean by counterfeiters, but if there are any down there, let's have them up, and see what they have to say."

The dining-room bell rang, and Mary instinctively hurried upstairs. At the same moment Blair ran down, three steps at a time, and bounded into the kitchen. He started when he saw Eliza.

"Are you all right, Miss Kent?" he asked, anxiously. "I've been so worried about you. Is that gas-man still here? I think I can smell gas escaping. Can I help in any way?"

"What you smell is a burnt cottage pudding," replied Kathleen. "There's a policeman in the cellar, I wish you'd call him up. I have a great mind to

ask him to take Eliza in charge. I don't think she's quite right."

Blair looked at Eliza closely.

"I agree with you, Miss Kathleen," he said. "She looks like a bad egg to me—a devilled egg, in fact. Which is the cellar door, cook?"

Eliza saw her chance.

"Right here, sir," she said, taking hold of the door knob. She swung the door open.

"Looks very dark," said Blair. "I can't quite see the step. Where is it?"

Eliza, eager to add this last specimen to her anthology in the cellar, stepped forward to point out the stairway. With one lusty push Blair shoved her through the door, and banged it to. He turned the key in the lock and thrust it into his pocket.

"Miss Kent," he said, "I'm afraid you must think us all crazy. If you will only let me have five minutes' uninterrupted talk with you, I can explain these absurd misadventures. Please, won't you let me?"

"To tell you the truth," said Kathleen, "I'm hungry. I've had only a plate of soup, and that was—counterfeit. I think that mad woman intended it for the curate, for whom she had conceived a dislike."

"Let's go up and sit in the dining-room, and I can talk while you eat."

At that moment Mrs. Kent's voice sounded at the top of the stairs.

"Kathleen, dear, is everything all right?"

"Yes, Mother," called Kathleen in

the same silvery soprano that set Blair's heart dancing.

"Your father wants Mr. Blair to come up to the drawing-room and talk to him. He wants to tell him about the Battle of Wolverhampton."

XIII

BLAIR, nervously playing with a key, stood by the fire in the drawing-room. Mrs. Kent had excused herself and gone upstairs. In the dining-room, across the hall, he could see Kathleen gleaning over the supper table while the maid cleared away the dishes. In spite of his peevishness, he smiled to see her pick up one of the stuffed eggs on a fork, taste it, and lay it down with a grimace. At the other end of the drawing-room Mr. Kent, leaning on his cane, was rummaging among some books.

"Here we are," said the antiquarian,

hobbling back with several heavy tomes. "Here is Clarendon's History. Now I want to read you what he has to say about that incident in 1645, then I will read you my manuscript notes, to show you how they fill up the gaps. Kathleen!"

"Yes, Dad," answered Kathleen, coming into the room.

"Will you get me my glasses, dear?"

"Yes, indeed," and she ran across the room to fetch them from the bookcase where he had left them. She seated herself on the arm of her father's chair. She was a charming and graceful figure, swinging the slender ankle that the Scorpions afterward described with imaginative fervour as "a psalm," "a fairy-tale," and "an aurora borealis." They none of them

ever agreed as to the dress she wore that evening; but Eliza Thick, who was perhaps the most observant, declared that it looked like a chintz curtain. I think it must have had small sprigs of flowers printed on it. Her eyes, exclaimed the broken-hearted gas-man, were like "a twilight with only two stars." Perhaps he meant a street with two lamps lighted.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're going to read your notes to Mr. Blair," she said, mischievously. "They are so fascinating, and there's such a jolly lot of them."

"Perhaps Mr. Kent's eyes are tired?" said Blair, hastily.

"Not a bit, not a bit!" said Mr. Kent. "I don't often get such a good listener. By the way, what happened

to that nice young curate? I hope the gas-man didn't injure him?"

Kathleen looked at Blair with dancing eyes.

"He had to go," declared Blair. "He was awfully sorry. He asked me to make his apologies."

"Perhaps the Bishop sent for him suddenly," said Kathleen.

"Well," resumed Mr. Kent, "I shall begin with the Battle of Naseby. After that memorable struggle, a portion of the royalist forces——"

The front-door bell trilled briskly.

"Oh, dear me," sighed poor Mr. Kent, looking up from his papers. "The fates are against us, Mr. Blair."

The Scotch terrier had been lying by the fire, caressed by the toe of Kathleen's slipper, as she sat on the

arm of her father's chair. Suddenly he jumped up, wagging his tail, and barked with evident glee. A tall, dark-eyed girl, a little older than Kathleen, pushed the hall curtains aside and darted into the room.

"Joe, you darling!" cried Kathleen. "How's your leg?"

"What do you mean?" asked Joe. "Which leg? What's wrong with it?"

"Well, Joe, my dear, this is a jolly surprise," said Mr. Kent, laying aside his books. "We heard you were laid up. Some misunderstanding somewhere. We've got a friend of yours here, you see—Mr. Blair."

Blair wished he could have sunk through the floor. He would have given anything to be with the other

four in the darkness of the cellar. His ears and cheeks burned painfully.

"How do you do, Mr. Blair," said Josephine, cordially. "There must be some mistake, I've never met Mr. Blair before."

"My dear Joe," cried Kathleen, "I do think we have all gone nuts. Look here!" She took three sheets of paper from the mantelpiece. "Did you or did you not send us those telegrams?"

Joe ran her eye over the messages, reading them aloud.

"*Miss Kathleen Kent:*

"*My friend Blair of Trinity now in Wolverhampton for historical study staying at Blue Boar nice chap American——*"

Here Joe raised her eyes and looked appraisingly at Blair, whose confusion was agonizing.

"may be call on you if so send him a line sorry can't write hurt hand playing soccer love to all. Joe."

" Frederick Kent: Unavoidably detained Oxford hurt leg playing soccer wish you could join me at once very urgent. Joe."

She bent down to the terrier which was standing affectionately at her feet.

"Well, Fred, old boy," she said, patting him, "did Joe send you a telegram, heh?"

"Mrs. Philip Kent: Have found very good cook out of place am sending her to you earnestly recommend give her a trial reliable woman but eccentric name Eliza Thick will call Sunday morning. Joe."

"My dear Kathleen," said Joe, "you flatter me. I never sent any of those

messages. Do you know any other Joes?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kent," said Blair. "But I must tell you. I sent two of those telegrams, and I think I can guess who sent the other. Miss Eliza Thick herself."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Kent and both girls in the same breath.

"Yes, Mr. Kent. I blush to confess it, but you and your family have been abominably hoaxed, and I can see nothing for it but to admit the truth. Painful as it is, I prefer to tell you everything."

The two girls settled themselves on the couch and Mr. Kent, bewildered, sat upright in his chair. The dog, satisfied that everything was serene, jumped on the divan and lay down

between Joe and Kathleen. The unhappy Blair stood awkwardly on the hearth rug.

"Last January," he began, "a gentleman by the name of Kenneth Forbes, an undergraduate of Merton College (now studying the gas meter in your cellar), was in Blackwell's book shop, in Oxford, browsing about. Lying on a row of books in a corner of the shop he happened to see a letter, without an envelope. He picked it up and glanced at it. It had evidently been dropped there by some customer.

"The address engraved on the paper was 318, Bancroft Road, Wolverhampton. It was dated last October and the letter began: 'Dear Joe, Thank you so much for the tie—it is pretty and I do wear ties sometimes,

so I sha'n't let the boys have it.' In the upper left-hand corner were four crosses, and the words 'These are from Fred.' The letter was signed 'Kathleen.'"

The two girls looked at each other.

"It so happened," continued Blair, "that the man who found the letter had promised to write, the very next day, the first chapter of a serial story for a little literary club to which he belonged. At the time when he found this letter lying about the bookshop he was racking his brain for a theme for his opening chapter. A great idea struck him. He put the letter in his pocket and hurried back to his room.

"His idea was to build up a story around the characters of the letter.

He had no idea whom it came from or to whom it was addressed. The thought of making these unknown persons of the letter the figures of the story appealed to him, and with an eager pen he set down the first chapter, with 'Kathleen' as heroine and 'Joe' as hero."

A faint line of colour crept up Kathleen's girlish cheek.

"This idea, which suggested itself to Forbes when he found the letter in the bookshop, was taken up enthusiastically by the group of undergraduates composing the little club. The fabrication of the story was the chief amusement of the term.

"It would be unfair to me and to the other men not to say frankly that the whim was not taken up in any

malicious or underhand spirit. Given the idea as it first came to the man in the bookshop, the rest flowed naturally out of it, urged by high spirits. I must tell you honestly that the characters of that letter became very real to us. We speculated endlessly on their personalities, tastes, and ages. We all became frantic admirers of the lady who had signed the letter, and considered ourselves jealous rivals of the man 'Joe,' to whom, as we supposed, it had been written. And when the end of term came, the five members who had entered most completely into the spirit of the game agreed to come to Wolverhampton for the express purpose of attempting to make the acquaintance of the Kathleen who had so engaged their fancy."

"Really, I think this is dreadfully silly," said Kathleen, colouring. "Joe, are we characters in a serial, or are we real persons?"

"This confession is very painful for me, Mr. Kent," said Blair, "because things don't seem to have turned out at all as we thought, and I'm afraid we have abused your hospitality barbarously. I can only beg that you will forgive this wild prank, which was actuated by the most innocent motives."

"Then do I understand," asked Mr. Kent, "that your interest in Wolverhampton history was merely simulated, for the purpose of making the acquaintance of my daughter?"

"You make me very much ashamed, sir, but that is the truth."

Mr. Kent rose to his feet, leaning on his cane.

"Well, well," he said, "I have no wish to seem crabbed. I'm sorry to lose so excellent a listener. I thought it was too good to be true! But when one has a daughter one must expect her to grow up, and become the heroine of serial stories. I trust that that story is not to be published—I can ask that, at least!"

"Our intention," said Blair, "was to give the manuscript to Miss Kent as a token of our united admiration."

"Well," said Mr. Kent, "make my apologies to the other conspirators. I take it that that dreadful Eliza Thick was one of them. I hope our cook will be back to-morrow. Upon my word, those stuffed eggs were inde-

scribable! Joe, my dear, suppose you let me take you up to see your aunt. I expect these people will want to recriminate each other a little, and reach some sort of misunderstanding."

Joe and Mr. Kent left the room, but a moment later Mr. Kent reappeared at the door.

"Mr. Blair," he said, "please don't think me lacking in sportsmanship. I was young once myself. I just wanted to say that I think you all staged it remarkably well. Give Mr. Carter my compliments on that telegram from the Bishop."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Blair, as Mr. Kent vanished behind the curtains. "I forgot. Those fellows are still down in the cellar." He held out the key. "I must let them out."

"Wait a minute," said Kathleen. "I have no desire to see that Eliza Thick again, nor that odious curate—not even the enterprising gas-man!"

For the space of fifteen thoughts or so there was silence. Kathleen sat at one end of the big couch, the fire-light shimmering round her in a softening glow. Blair stood painfully at the other side of the hearth.

"Miss Kathleen," he said, "I want to beg you, on behalf of the other fellows, not to be too severe with them. I guess I'm the worst offender, with my bogus telegrams and my deliberate deception of your father. But I ought to explain that we all came here with a definite intention in mind. The man who was first able to engage you in friendly conversation and get you

to accept an invitation to come to Oxford for Eights Week, was to be the winner of the competition."

"I've already accepted an invitation for Eights Week," she said, after a pause.

He uttered a dejected silence that was a classic of its kind, a marvel of accurate registration.

Kathleen looked up at him for the first time since his confession of the hoax. Their eyes met.

"Is it Carter?" he asked, woefully.

"I've promised to go and stay with Joe at Maggie Hall."

"Look here," he said. "I expect to row in the Trinity boat. Will you and your mother and—and Miss Joe—watch the racing from our barge, one afternoon anyway? Then you could

come to tea in my rooms afterward, and I'll ask the other fellows in to meet you."

"The parson and the policeman and the gas-man, and—and—Eliza Thick?"

"Yes. They're all splendid chaps, I know you'll like them."

"Well," she murmured, "I dare say Eliza Thick would be all right in his proper costume. I shall never forget his nest-building genius! Now I understand what he meant by all that talk about counterfeiters."

"You will come to the Trinity barge?" he begged.

There was a pause. A dropping coal clicked in the grate, and Kathleen's small slipper tapped on the fender.

"I should think," she said, "that

a man as persistent as you would make a good oar. I'm glad the others aren't Americans, too. It was bad enough as it was!"

"Miss Kathleen," he pleaded, "I guess I can't make you understand what I'd like to. But if you'll just come punting up the Cher, on Sunday in Eights Week, there are so many things I'd like to tell you."

"Yes, I've always wanted to hear about America, and the difference between a Republican and a Democrat."

"And you *will* come?"

Kathleen rose, laughing.

"I have already accepted Joe's invitation," she said. "Good-night, Mr. Blair." She gave him her hand.

He held it as long as he dared, looking her straight in the eye.

"I'm not nearly as jealous of Joe as I was!"

She was gone through the curtains, a flash of dainty grace. Then her face reappeared.

"If you care to call again some time, Dad would love to read you those notes on the Battle of Wolverhampton!"

Blair looked round the room. The dog, lying by the fire, got up, stretched, and wagged his tail. Blair pulled out his watch. "Giminy!" he said, "I'd better go down and let those poor devils out of the cellar."

THE END

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